

Cable Signal Leakage

FCC Consumer Facts

Background

Cable television systems use radio frequency (RF) signals transmitted over cables to provide television and data services to customers. Normally, these RF signals do not cause interference when cable systems comply with the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) Rules. Occasionally, however, cable television systems can “leak.” Cable leaks occur when the RF signal within a cable system exceeds the FCC limit. Cable signal leaks may be caused by loose connectors, cracked or unterminated cables, and corrosion caused by high humidity.

Why Is It Important to Determine Leakage?

Cable television systems use many of the same frequencies to transmit programming as licensed over-the-air users. For example, cable systems use TV and radio channels, and aeronautical radio channels, among others. Cable operators are considered the secondary users of these frequencies; therefore they must not interfere with the licensed over-the-air users who are the protected (primary) users of these frequencies.

What Problems Can Signal Leakage Cause?

Cable signal leakage can interfere with any of the radio services that happen to be using the same frequencies as the cable operator within the vicinity of the cable system. Such interference, especially on the safety-of-life radio channels, can interfere with the communications of safety personnel or airplane pilots. When such interference occurs, it can endanger the lives of the public and hamper the rescue efforts of safety personnel.

What are the FCC Rules Governing Signal Leakage?

The FCC has set maximum individual signal leakage levels for cable systems. As a further measure, the FCC requires cable operators to have a periodic on-going program to inspect, locate and repair leaks on their systems. In light of the potential for harmful interference that may be caused by a cable system interfering with aeronautical navigational and communications, the FCC requires more stringent regulations for cable systems that use aeronautical frequencies.

Does a Cable Operator Need to Come into My Home to Monitor for Signal Leakage?

Usually, no. Cable operators can use equipment to locate the general vicinity of a leak. However, sometimes to pinpoint a leakage source for subsequent repair, they may request access to your home.

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Am I Required to Let the Cable Operator into My Home to Monitor for and Repair Signal Leakage?

Homeowners have the right to deny access to their premises. However, the cable operator can disconnect service to you if the leak cannot be repaired without access to your home.

Can My Cable Operator Terminate My Service Because of Signal Leakage?

The FCC's rules allow cable operators to discontinue service to an individual to repair signal leakage in excess of FCC standards. Service is restored when the signal leakage problem is remedied.

Is the Cable Operator Responsible for Repairing the Signal Leakage on Subscriber-owned Equipment?

No.

Can I Hook Up a Second Set Myself?

In terms of the signal leakage rules, yes, but since the cable operator is responsible for leakage from the wiring, the operator can either refuse to connect to it or terminate service if the hook up causes signal leakage problems.

Is Signal Leakage Biologically Harmful?

The power levels used in a cable system are low. Therefore, it is unlikely that the signal leakage from a cable facility exceed the FCC's RF exposure limits.

Who Enforces Signal Leakage: the Local Municipalities or the FCC?

The FCC.

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